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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000410

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AND INR/I

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: INFORMATION ON SOURCE OF POLITICAL IMPASSE IN
KUWAIT (C-NE8-00589)

REF: A. SECSTATE 37854

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 0320

[1](#)C. KUWAIT 0313

[1](#)D. KUWAIT 0307

[1](#)E. KUWAIT 0043

[1](#)F. 07 KUWAIT 1760

Classified By: CDA Alan G. Misenheimer for reason 1.4 (b)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The Kuwaiti Cabinet's mass resignation and the Amir's subsequent dissolution of Parliament represent the widely expected culmination of a contentious and dysfunctional relationship between the GOK and Parliament going back several years. In the short term, the dissolution provides the opportunity for new parliamentary elections and the potential for an improved relationship between the Cabinet and Parliament. In the long term, this latest parliamentary crisis is just one of many that have played out over the past 30 years, from which there will be no lasting damage done to Kuwait's democracy, its stability or its bilateral relationship with the United States. Further analysis of the upcoming elections and the potential impact of Kuwait's electoral redistricting will be reported septel. End summary.

Dissolution Widely Expected

[1](#)2. (C) Relations between Kuwait's executive branch and Parliament have been consistently tense since the current Amir, Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al Sabah, came to power in January 2006. Parliamentarians have kept the GOK on the defensive with accusations of corruption and mismanagement, and the GOK's efforts to recapture the initiative were largely ineffective. This impasse produced a series of "grillings" (interpellations), both threatened and actual, against government ministers. As a result, five ministers resigned or were forced out from January to October 2007.

[1](#)3. (C) Due to this contentious relationship, Parliament was largely ineffective and failed to pass much needed political and social reform legislation. Meanwhile, MPs demonstrated a disturbing preference for constituent pandering and politically motivated grillings, as opposed to tending to the people's business. Consequently, Kuwaitis of all stripes became disenchanted with the previous Parliament and were anxious for the Amir to resolve the impasse via a constitutional dissolution of the National Assembly. The Kuwaiti populace had generally expected this move toward the end of 2007 (ref F), and in particular during the grilling of Education Minister Nouriyah Al-Sabeeh in January 2008 (ref E). The Cabinet's mass resignation on March 17 (ref D) therefore came as no surprise to the Kuwaiti populace.

¶4. (S) Whether the cabinet's mass resignation was dictated by the Amir or by other factions within the Al Sabah family is unclear. Nevertheless, a parliamentary dissolution was the only logical outcome of this action. The eventual dissolution on March 19 (ref B) was generally met with a sense of relief among the Kuwaiti populace, who welcomed Al Sabah leadership in resolving the crisis. However, the long-term effects of these events on Al Sabah prestige within Kuwait and the resolution of internal factional differences within the royal family remain to be seen.

¶5. (S) Nevertheless, the royal family will be under close scrutiny for its selection of ministers after the elections. Many Kuwaitis have been critical of the ruling family's selections in the past, complaining that the ministers' backgrounds oftentimes bore no relation to their portfolios. The ministers consequently made easy grilling targets for MPs bent on exerting pressure on the government. Many Kuwaitis hope that the Al Sabah have internalized this lesson and will appoint more competent ministers, relative to their portfolio, in the coming National Assembly.

¶6. (S) Of particular popular interest is the selection of the next Prime Minister. While interim PM Shaykh Nasser Al Sabah seems the logical choice, many Kuwaitis criticize him for not providing stronger leadership during the last National Assembly. Instead, some Kuwaitis believe Deputy National Guard Commander Shaykh Mish'al Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al Sabah will assume this duty because of his more forceful approach and his reputed ability to keep wayward MPs in line. Others speculate that the Amir's strongman, Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd

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Al-Ahmed Al Sabah, currently president of the National Security Bureau, will take up this role, although this scenario is less likely because of his previous difficulties as Energy Minister.

Election Outlook -----

¶7. (C) Irrespective of past political difficulties, the current mood in Kuwaiti is one of enthusiasm - for both the parliamentary elections under the new districting system and the potential for a fresh start in the National Assembly. Kuwaitis across the spectrum are uncertain how the new electoral districting system will impact the elections. Nevertheless, it appears likely that Shi'a will vote along more sectarian lines due to recent unrest in the wake of Imad Mugniyah's assassination (ref C), and that the Islamic Constitutional Movement (i.e. Kuwait Muslim Brotherhood) may enjoy greater success due to their superior organizational and campaigning ability. Salafis and tribal candidates may also make gains due to Kuwait's overall demographic and social trends.

¶8. (S) Because of a ban on political parties, it is unclear what the Al Sabah are doing, if anything, to support the election of pro-government MPs. Stalwarts such as Jassem Al-Khorafi and Mohammed Al-Sager do not appear to be in danger of losing their seats, but face new challenges in reaching out to constituents in the new five district constituency system. These two candidates hailed from traditionally pro-government constituencies, but they must now court bedouin and tribal voters as well since their constituency has expanded. These latter constituents have proven easily swayed by the rhetoric of less responsible MPs who campaign on popular issues such as consumer debt forgiveness, increased stipends for Kuwaiti citizens and the protection of personal property built on public lands.

¶9. (S) In addition, widespread rumors of election engineering and vote buying have lead to familiar calls for Al Sabah

family operatives such as Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd, Shaykh Athbi Fahd Al-Ahmad (the Amir's nephew) and Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak (the grandson of Amir Mubarak the Great) - the so-called "trio of corruption" - to leave the country. Nevertheless, vote buying does appear to be reaching historic proportions in Kuwait, with votes rumored to be worth KD 1,000 (USD 3,700) a piece. Interestingly, some embassy employees reported recruitment attempts to assist in vote buying schemes.

Overall Impact

¶10. (C) This is the fifth parliamentary dissolution in Kuwait since 1976, and the second since 2006. As such, this dissolution continues a broader trend of political impasse followed by parliamentary dissolution. Importantly, the Amir opted to dissolve Parliament constitutionally and call for elections within 60 days, as is his right. This move reaffirmed the Amir's commitment to the democratic process, and demonstrates the overall health of Kuwait's conspicuously untidy democracy. Regardless of the outcome of the elections on May 17, the Al Sabah will remain firmly in charge and firmly committed to its bilateral relationship with the United States.

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Misenheimer